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ABSTRACT

College outdoor professionals are often simultaneously administrators, educators, and managers of student leaders. The manager role may be lost in the shadow of the others, yet can be the most powerful in creating a successful outdoor program. This paper reviews some relevant management principles gleaned from the business world and suggests ways to put them into practice. A quality college program must have quality training for its student instructors. Thorough training ensures that staff can be independent and do not need to be told how to do their jobs. Feedback can be used to both train and manage outdoor leaders and can be a powerful motivator. In addition to good training, student instructors must be given the tools they need to do the job well. These tools can include short printed curriculum guidelines and tips for effective teaching, course checklists of things to do, a policies and procedures manual, and a goal-setting session prior to beginning new student-developed projects. Other strategies for personnel management include creating group unity and a family atmosphere through intense group experiences, all-staff retreats, newsletters, and continuing education; offering leadership opportunities within the organization; using self-evaluation as a means of improvement; and encouraging learning of new skills. Parameters specific to running a college outdoor program include remembering that student instructors are volunteers, setting timetables to encourage student attention to deadlines, and coping with the student criticisms that come with a family atmosphere. (SV)

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Outdoor Program Management Concepts for the 90's

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Abstract— College outdoor professionals are often simultaneously administrators, educators and managers. Separately, these are very different roles requiring very different skills. Being all these at the same time can be difficult and demands great balance. Of these different roles, the manager is often overlooked, yet is one of the most crucial aspects of running an outdoor program. Much of the current literature on management is directly applicable to the outdoor recreation field. This paper will present some relevant management principles and suggest some ways to put them into practice.

Introduction

Society is changing. People are demanding quality service everywhere they go. Organizations that cannot provide their clientele with the service they want will not survive into the next century. Organizations must adapt and strive for constant improvement. The survivors who win be those that recognize people as their number one resource, and put the welfare of their employees as a top priority (Blanchard & Johnson, 1982; Miner, 1991). Because unsatisfied employees do unsatisfactory work, the best path to quality service is through happy , motivated and involved people (Covey, 1992). It is the manager's job to get people to do good work by convincing them that doing a quality job will add to the quality of their lives, and usually to the lives of others (Glasser, 1992). Yet none of this can be forced; coercion in any form is destructive. People don't do anything unless they want to. A good manager facilitates a genuinely happy environment where employees strive for the very best *because they want to.* Good management is the key to the Quality Organization that society seems to be demanding these days.

College outdoor programs could benefit from what the business world is learning about management. In fact, college outdoor professionals often face more complex challenges because they also play the roles of administrator, educator, and friend to their student leaders. The manager role can easily be lost in the shadow of the others, yet it can be the most powerful in the creation of a successful outdoor pregrain. What follows are some guiding principles to creating a successful program and some hints for putting them into practice. Keep in mind that the key to success is a happy, motivated, and involved staff.

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Train a Staff You Can Trust

It is obvious that a quality college program should have quality training for its student instructors. How awful would it be if a program director could not trust his or her leaders to teach good courses and lead safe trips! It is crucial to have a well trained staff from a managerial standpoint as well. To be happy and motivated, people need to have autonomy and feel a sense of ownership of their work (Byham & Cox, 1988). This means they need a good deal of independence. To have a boss constantly looking over one's shoulder and correcting mistakes is a very disempowering experience. No one enjoys working in a police atmosphere. People like to be able to figure things out for themselves, especially those students drawn to be experiential educators. Therefore it is important to fight the temptation to tell staff *exactly* how to do their job. Assume that once they learn their job, they know as much as anyone about how to do it well (Glasser, 1992). Staff need to be trained *thoroughly* so they do not need to be policed, and so they do not need to be told how to do their jobs after they have been trained. Make sure that all expectations are made clear up front.

Feedback is a tool that can be as instrumental in the training of leaders as it is in their management Blanchard and Johnson (1982) claim that feedback on performance is the number one motivator of people. "Catch someone doing something right." (ibid) "Effective feedback preserves student dignity, acknowledges strengths and enables [teaming from mistakes] .... [It] is immediate, specific, growth oriented, tactful, and shows a cause and effect relationship." (Stebbins, 1992, p.6.)

Set them up for Success

It takes more than good training for student instructors to perform well. They need to be given the *tools* they need to do their job well. Many programs have courses or other activities offered on a regular basis. A balance needs to be found between instructors re-inventing the wheel each time, and doing everything for them so rigidly that there is no room for the instructor's creativity. One suggestion for each course is to have a one page "Curriculum Guide" which lists those essential elements specific to that course. This can include guidelines for what to teach and suggestions for effective teaching. Subtle differences in the presentation of this document can make a huge difference in instructor's attitudes. These guidelines can be included in a place with staff and student course evaluations, and any handouts or other useful information pertaining to that course. A "Course Checklist," as a reminder of things to do, like reserve a van and get a permit, can also help set up staff for success. Details can be included in a "Policies and Procedures Manual," which is a good place to make expectations clear.

Often in outdoor programs, students work independently on special projects, such as slideshows, putting together break trips, developing new curricula, etc. Administrators need to approve everything produced under their supervision for obvious quality and safety reasons. However, receiving a "veto" stamp on a project a student has worked hard on can be devastating. If this happens often, no one will volunteer to do any more projects! A much preferable scenario is to take the time to have a thorough goal setting session at the beginning of each new project (Blanchard & Johnson, 1982). If both the manager and the student are clear on expectations and the parameters associated with a given project, then the student has the true wisdom to accomplish the goals in the best way he or she sees fit, and need not fear a veto upon completion. An easy way to accomplish this is to list on paper the project's goals, parameters, next check-in time and tasks to be completed (Baglio, 1993). This does not need to be a boring list, but can be made fun and interesting. It is even more effective to create this list with the student during the goal-setting session

Create Community

"Quality is always the product of warm, caring human relations." (Glasser, 1992, p. 177) People put more into any group or task if it feels good, they know they will be appreciated for their efforts and are doing things for people they care about. Being part of a healthy, supportive community is of equal value to the leadership and skills experience they receive from an outdoor program. (Leonoudakis, 1991) However, at a school with a program instead of an outing club, there is potential for some of the fun to be lost to the business end of things. Doing things to facilitate a family atmosphere can help bring the fun back, which is what it is all about anyway.

There are few things that bring a group together as much as an intense shared experience (Napier, 1993). A group that goes through an intense program, while resolving conflicts along the way, has great potential to develop into a strong community. If each training group has similar experiences, such as voyaging on similar expeditions, then there is a common bond between all the leaders in an organization. Other family building activities include all-staff retreats each semester, staff newsletters, and Fall, Winter, and Spring break trips. Continuing education, an essential part of any successful organization, also serves to build staff unity. Senior staff members often develop specialties, and can be encouraged to share them with others. What could be better than a bunch of friends teaming together in a fun way?

Offer Leadership Opportunities within the Organization

"People want to make meaningful contributions. They want their talents identified, used, and recognized .... They want to be part of a mission and enterprise that transcends their individual tasks." (Covey, 1992, p. 178-180.) Few experiences can be as valuable to a student as being a leader and accepting responsibility for the whole, or part of an organization. Students can also help alleviate some of the burdens of directors, and allow much more to be done in a program with fewer full-time staff. Some leadership positions include: Assistant Staff Training Instructors, Program Assistants who plan special events, and assist in the administering of the program, Climbing and Caving Coordinators, Head Downhill and Cross Country Instructors and First Aid Specialists. Many of the things administrators do can be done, and done well, by students *if they are set up for success.*

Special projects are other areas in which to use students strengths. Many students have good organizational skills. Some enjoy putting together slide shows. Others have desktop publishing or video experience. It can be a great source of pride to have put together an awesome newsletter, flyer or video, or do something else that is impressive and helpful to many people.

Use Student Self-Evaluation

Evaluation as a means of improvement is an integral part of any organization dedicated to quality. Many programs utilize written student, staff and administrative evaluations, and these are very helpful to the administrators. For student leaders (and students in general) an external evaluation is just one more thing that people are telling them. Students are bombarded by so much information that it is possible for only a fraction to be assimilated. If an evaluation is to have real meaning to a student, then he or she must evaluate him or her self (Glasser, 1992). It is through this introspection that true self improvement is made. In the realm of experiential education, why should self-evaluation be excluded?

Putting self-evaluation into practice can be more difficult than other things because it is a skill that is often new to students, and they need to be taught something about how to do it. Thought provoking questions on a written form can be helpful. "What did you learn about yourself and your leadership style?" "What new things, if any, did you try on this course?" "What did you learn about group dynamics?" A manager can help facilitate the self-evaluation process during a focused

debriefing of the instructors at the conclusion of a course.

Sharpen the Saw

Two wood cutters were having a race to see who could cut the most wood in a day. One cutter worked as hard as he could all day and only stopped long enough to eat hastily and drink. The second cutter worked hard for a few hours, then rested for a half an hour, then worked some more, then rested again. Each time she rested, she took a file to her blade. This pattern continued for the whole day. At the end of the day the second cutter had cut more wood than the first. The non-stop worker could not believe it. "I worked incessantly all day while you rested so much. How can that be?" When asked how often he sharpened his saw, he replied "Rarely, I never have the time'cause there is always so much wood to cut." (Covey, 1989)

Taking the time to learn new skills to help you do your job better always pays off in the long run. Both you and your organization will be happier. Modeling this drive for excellence, as well as other desired behaviors, can inspire your students to sharpen the saw.

Parameters of Running a College Outdoor Program

1. The obvious difference between a college outdoor program and a business office is that students need to be full-time students first, and outdoor educators second. Student instructors are not dependent on your organization for their livelihood; they are there only because they want to be. Therefore, they need to be managed more as volunteers. Volunteers can up and leave at any time, and that is one more reason to keep them happy and feeling appreciated (Watters, 199 1)

2. Students often talk about the "real world" as something that happens after graduation. Given this, the "real world" can be defined as "a place where the things you do affect other people." In the academic setting, the work done by students in school only immediately affects themselves, and their GPA. Deadlines tend not to mean very much to students. If it is OK with the professor, then who cares if something is a week late? Although this can be an appealing way to live, the "extension mindset can be frustrating to program managers. This common attitude is one of the conditions of running a "real world" progam in an academic setting. Being up front with expectations, and setting realistic timetables is generally more effective than nagging and dwelling on lateness.

3. A program with a family atmsphere has its drawbacks. Through spending weeks in the woods with students, program managers gain a closeness with them that is not usually there with most teacher/ student or boss/employee relationships. The benefits are, obvious; however, college students are trained to be analytical in their thought process. This lack of distance makes students all the more comfortable with open criticism of each other and the management, just like a real family! Though sometimes very tiring, student criticism is healthy because it is all part of their teaming process, and part of the program manager's job as an educator. The reward comes when students realize what they have gained through their experience in the program.

Conclusion

Management theory is going through a shift these days. Healthy organizations are no longer rigid. Roles are changing. No longer are managers the people at the top giving orders, plowing the way while the people are dragged along by their collars. (People don't like that very much.) Even titles and labels are changing too: "managers" and "supervisors" vs. "employees" and "workers," are going out (Harari, 1993). In the outdoor education field, perhaps "group leader" is a more appropriate label than "manager." The way of the future is encouraging and inspiring people to become a guiding force in their organization. College outdoor programs will be able to offer more empowering and profound experiences to more people the more they involve students in the creation of their programs.

To accomplish this, outdoor programmers must train instructors well, set them up for success, and learn how to "manage" effectively.

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